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Amnesia in Women's History: Challenging the Ahistoricism of 'Aisyiyah within the Indonesian Historiography

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Abstract

The marginal position of 'Aisyiyah within Indonesian national historiography cannot be explained simply by a shortage of documentation or scholarship. Its archives are rich, its intellectual figures are capable, and its historical contribution predates the most celebrated milestones of Indonesian nationalism. The central problem is not simply the availability of evidence, but how that evidence is organized into a sustained historical construction. This paper argues that 'Aisyiyah's historiographical invisibility is produced by two conditions operating simultaneously: a structural amnesia from outside, in which the paradigm of national history writing was never designed to accommodate women-based Islamic movements as sovereign subjects; and an ahistoricism from within, in which the organization itself has not yet translated its intellectual capacity into a serious collective historical project. Drawing on critical historical method and engaging selectively with Trouillot's framework of historical silencing, specifically its third and fourth moments concerning narrative production and historical retrospection, this paper maps how these two conditions have reinforced each other across successive periods from the post-independence era through the New Order to the present. The findings suggest that reorienting 'Aisyiyah's historiographical position requires more than advocacy for representation. It demands a paradigmatic shift, one already implicit in the organization's own foundational principles, toward a historical construction that begins from locality, integrates faith and progress as inseparable, and positions 'Aisyiyah not as a footnote awaiting recognition but as a subject capable of narrating its own past. Keyword: Ahistoricism Historiography, 'Aisyiyah History, Women's Movement.

Keywords: Aisyiyah Historiography, Historical Amnesia, Ahistoricism.

Abstrak

Posisi marginal 'Aisyiyah dalam historiografi nasional Indonesia tidak dapat dijelaskan semata-mata oleh kekurangan dokumentasi atau kajian akademik. Arsipnya kaya, tokoh-tokoh intelektualnya kompeten, dan kontribusi historisnya mendahului tonggak-tonggak paling ikonik dalam nasionalisme Indonesia. Yang absen bukan bukti melainkan konstruksi. Tulisan ini berargumen bahwa ketidakhadiran historiografis 'Aisyiyah diproduksi oleh dua kondisi yang bekerja secara bersamaan: amnesia struktural dari luar, di mana paradigma penulisan sejarah nasional tidak pernah dirancang untuk mengakomodasi gerakan perempuan Islam sebagai subjek yang berdaulat; dan ahistorisme dari dalam, di mana organisasi itu sendiri belum menerjemahkan kapasitas intelektualnya menjadi proyek historis kolektif yang serius. Dengan menggunakan metode sejarah kritis dan melibatkan kerangka Trouillot tentang pembungkaman sejarah secara selektif, khususnya momen ketiga dan keempat yang menyangkut produksi narasi dan retrospeksi historis, tulisan ini memetakan bagaimana kedua kondisi itu saling memperkuat sepanjang periode yang berbeda dari era pasca-kemerdekaan hingga Orde Baru dan masa kini. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa mereorientasi posisi historiografis 'Aisyiyah membutuhkan lebih dari sekadar advokasi representasi. Ia menuntut pergeseran paradigmatik yang sesungguhnya sudah tersirat dalam prinsip-prinsip dasar organisasi itu sendiri, menuju konstruksi historis yang berangkat dari lokalitas, mengintegrasikan kemajuan dan keimanan sebagai sesuatu yang tidak terpisahkan, dan menempatkan 'Aisyiyah bukan sebagai catatan kaki yang menunggu diakui melainkan sebagai subjek yang mampu menarasikan masa lalunya sendiri.

Kata Kunci: Historiografi 'Aisyiyah, Amnesia Sejarah, Ahistorisme.

INTRODUCTION

There is something deeply unsettling about the following fact: a women's movement that helped organize one of the most celebrated events in Indonesian nationalist history, there is something deeply unsettling about the following discrepancy: a women's movement that helped organize one of the most celebrated events in Indonesian nationalist history has not secured a historiographical position commensurate with that contribution. 'Aisyiyah was founded in 1917, more than a decade before the Youth Pledge and the First Women's Congress in Yogyakarta were both held in 1928. Two of its figures were not merely present at that Congress but were among those who helped pioneer its organization, yet that foundational contribution proved insufficient to establish 'Aisyiyah standing in the mainstream of Indonesian historiography that emerged from the very same event [1]. This is not a minor oversight. It is a historiographical problem, and understanding it requires understanding how Indonesian historiography itself was built. The tradition of writing national history in this country underwent a decisive transformation in the decades following independence, shifting from a colonial framework that positioned Indonesia as the object of someone else's narrative toward a paradigm that consciously placed Indonesians as the primary actors of their own history[2]. Yet this transformation carried within it a blind spot that has rarely been examined: it did not define with any seriousness who precisely counted as an Indonesian historical actor. In practice, the category more often referred to political elites, nationalist leaders, and figures whose contributions could be measured in the language of state and politics. When the first *Seminar Sejarah* convened in December 1957 and formalized this Indonesia-centric paradigm, 'Aisyiyah, as one of the oldest women-based movements in the country, was already absent from the agenda. The historiographical problem of 'Aisyiyah does not begin with neglect. It begins with the limits of a historiographical paradigm in which 'Aisyiyah has rarely been treated as a historical subject in its own right.

The neglect of 'Aisyiyah does not stand in isolation. It is part of a broader and older pattern within the Indonesian historiographical tradition, one that consistently positions women as supplementary figures in the national narrative rather than as actors who shaped it. Amini identifies androcentrism as the prevailing current in Indonesian historical writing, in which women's presence in history has been persistently rendered as secondary.[3] In a wider frame, this problem is not simply a matter of oversight on the part of historians, but rather a reflection of how Indonesian historiography has structurally constructed the category of who qualifies as a legitimate historical subject.[4] Joan Wallach Scott reminds us that gender is not a variable added onto pre-existing historical narratives, but an active historical category in the very production of historical knowledge itself.[5] Within this framework, 'Aisyiyah absence from the national narrative is not merely a representational problem but an epistemological one. What further complicates the matter is that 'Aisyiyah faced not one but two layers of marginalization: as a women's organization, and as an Islamic organization that could not be easily accommodated within the secular nationalist construction that dominated Indonesian historiography from the outset of independence.[6] It is precisely these two overlapping layers that make 'Aisyiyah position in Indonesian history far more complex than a simple matter of collective forgetting.

Existing scholarship has already demonstrated that women within Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama have exercised religious authority through education, textual interpretation, and extensive organizational networks. Van Doorn-Harder's study is particularly important in showing that these women are not merely recipients of religious instruction but participants in shaping Islamic knowledge and social change.[7] This recognition sharpens the question pursued here: how far has knowledge of women's religious and organizational agency been translated into a historiography that treats 'Aisyiyah as a collective historical subject in its own right.

The absence discussed in this paper should not be understood as a complete lack of writing about 'Aisyiyah. Organizational accounts, biographical works, and academic studies do exist, and their contributions should not be dismissed. The problem concerns the position these writings have enabled 'Aisyiyah to occupy: whether it appears primarily as an adjunct to Muhammadiyah, as a collection of individual biographies, or as a collective historical subject whose experiences help shape the interpretation of Indonesian history. Accordingly, this paper examines not an absolute absence of historical knowledge, but the distance between its production, its institutional consolidation, and its incorporation into broader historiographical narratives.

What makes this problem more acute is that the neglect of 'Aisyiyah did not come exclusively from outside. The earliest systematic effort to build a Muhammadiyah historiography began in the mid-1960s when the Central Board of Muhammadiyah established an institution called Dokrah, an abbreviation of Dokumentasi dan Sejarah, or Documentation and History. The institution produced a number of short biographical works and local histories, though similar efforts had been undertaken in partial form by HM Yunus Anis as early as the mid-1930s[8]. From outside the organization, Alfian opened a more academically rigorous historical inquiry through his dissertation published by Gadjah Mada University Press, though the Indonesian-language edition circulated only very narrowly for several decades after its initial publication(Alfian1989). Deliar Noer provided an important foundation for situating Muhammadiyah within the broader context of modern Islamic movements in Indonesia, though his analytical focus rested more on the political dynamics of the movement than on its internal organizational dimensions, particularly those concerning women [10]. From within Muhammadiyah's own circle, the book by Musthafa Kamal Pasha written in the early 1970s and later distributed widely in a popular edition became the most widely read account of Muhammadiyah history. Unfortunately, the author's depth in the genealogy of classical and contemporary Islamic thought left the organizational dimension of 'Aisyiyah almost entirely absent from the text. A limited corrective was later offered by A. Adaby Darban, but given how broadly the popular edition had already circulated, the damage was compounded rather than repaired: 'Aisyiyah had by then disappeared not only from the national historiography but from Muhammadiyah's own account of itself [11].

The problem that had taken root since the earliest phases of national history writing was then compounded by the New Order era, which added a new and heavier layer to it. In two complementary works, Saskia Wieringa demonstrates that the New Order did not merely suppress women's movements politically but systematically dismantled their historical narratives as well[12]. Through the mechanism of state ibuism, analysed with considerable precision by Julia Suryakusuma, Indonesian women were

redefined as wives and mothers of national development through Dharma Wanita and the PKK, while organizations with independent ideological bases were compelled to negotiate within the tight boundaries set by the state[13]. Within this pressure, 'Aisyiyah did not face active destruction as Gerwani did, but it experienced something equally damaging over the long term: neutralization. Research on 'Aisyiyah during this period shows that the organization had little room to manoeuvre beyond aligning itself with government-prescribed programs, losing the space to articulate its movement identity autonomously. As a consequence, in the historiographical record, 'Aisyiyah progressively shrank into a minor appendage of Muhammadiyah history and became almost invisible in the broader narrative of Indonesian women's history. If before the New Order 'Aisyiyah could still be claimed as part of the national movement's history, then after three decades of authoritarian rule, that claim had grown increasingly difficult to sustain, as its traces in the historiographical memory had grown thin.

The accumulated layers of this problem now converge on a stagnation that is felt most acutely at precisely the moment when 'Aisyiyah possesses greater intellectual resources than at any point in its history. The organization has produced scholars, built institutions of higher learning, and established extensive academic networks, Yet the existence of these intellectual resources raises a more demanding question: why has the historical work already produced not been consolidated into a sustained organizational responsibility? What has taken place instead resembles a demand for recognition: questioning why ‘Aisyiyah name does not appear in a given historical narrative, rather than building that narrative from its foundations. Yet the concept of history is far more complex than the presence of a name in a text. This posture is not merely insufficient as a response to the problem at hand; it is itself part of the problem. It is from this point that this paper identifies two faces of a single condition: on one side, Indonesian women's history suffers from amnesia because 'Aisyiyah has been absent from its historiography; on the other, 'Aisyiyah has been ahistorical in the way it regards its own past. Amini has demonstrated that the loss of ‘Aisyiyah narrative within Indonesian historiography is a genuine problem deserving serious attention, yet the question of what mechanism produced that loss, and of ‘Aisyiyah own internal responsibility within it, remains unanswered. It is from that gap that this paper proceeds, and it does so by posing three questions: what is the actual position of 'Aisyiyah in Indonesian national history and educational curriculum? What mechanisms have produced this structural silencing in successive layers? And how might historiography be reoriented to place 'Aisyiyah not as an object awaiting recognition, but as a sovereign subject of its own historical narrative.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding how the historiographical problem of 'Aisyiyah could form and persist for so long requires a theoretical framework capable of addressing two layers of the problem simultaneously: an amnesia that arrives from outside as a product of power, and an ahistoricism that grows from within as a product of historical unconsciousness. W.F. Wertheim, in *Indonesian Society in Transition*, laid an important foundation by demonstrating that Indonesian society was not a passive object of historical change but an active agent too often overlooked by Western observers.[14] Yet paradoxically, the analytical framework Wertheim himself constructed, like much of the Indonesian historiography that followed it, did not provide adequate space for gender as an active historical category. It is into this gap

that Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* intervenes, arguing that silencing in history is not mere oversight but the product of four moments of power: the making of sources, the making of archives, the making of narratives, and the making of history itself[15]. This paper draws on Trouillot's four moments of silencing, while concentrating its analysis on narrative production and retrospective significance. The existence of organizational records does not eliminate questions about source and archive formation; those questions remain relevant but are not the principal focus of the present analysis, and their combined effect produces what Jan Assmann distinguishes as a failure of transition from communicative memory living within a community to cultural memory institutionalized in texts, curricula, and national monuments[16]. This condition is compounded by what Joan Wallach Scott formulated as the epistemological bias in how historiography understands who is entitled to be a historical subject: gender is not a variable added to pre-existing narratives but a category active in the very production of historical knowledge[5]. Recent scholarship on women's narratives in Indonesian history textbooks reinforces this argument by demonstrating that gender bias in the historical curriculum is not merely a problem of insufficient representation but of an epistemological construction that systematically excludes women from the category of legitimate historical actors[17].

At the second layer, the problem of ahistoricism requires a complementary but distinct conceptual framework. Ahistoricism, as used here, does not denote an absence of historical awareness among 'Aisyiyah's members, nor does it deny the historical works they have produced. It refers to the organizational gap between possessing historical knowledge and making its production, preservation, and transmission a sustained collective responsibility. The criticism is therefore directed at the institutional treatment of history, rather than at the intellectual capacities of individual members. Collective amnesia in this sense is not simply ignorance of the past; it is the inability to build an organic relationship between past and present as the foundation for action. It is here that Kuntowijoyo offers a conceptual contribution that has not been sufficiently valued in Indonesian academic discourse, despite its relevance being no less than that of theories arriving from elsewhere. In *Metodologi Sejarah*, Kuntowijoyo states explicitly that the writing of women's history in Indonesia remains deeply underdeveloped because Indonesian historiography is dominated by themes of politics and military affairs, which are at their core a history of male power and dominance[18] . Beyond diagnosis, proposes a direction for paradigmatic shift: from androcentric history toward androgynous history, in which men and women together take part as equal historical actors[19]. In the context of 'Aisyiyah, this paradigmatic shift is not merely an external historiographical agenda to be pressed from outside the organization, but an epistemological necessity that should grow from within it. When 'Aisyiyah remains occupied with demanding the recognition of its name without building its own historical construction, it is in effect maintaining the position of an object within someone else's narrative rather than building the position of a subject within its own. The theoretical framework constructed in this paper treats both layers, external amnesia and internal ahistoricism, as two sides of a single problem, and regards the shift toward the androgynous history proposed by Kuntowijoyo as the normative horizon of the historiographical reorientation this paper argues for.

METHOD

This paper employs the method of critical history operationalized through five stages: the selection of topic, heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Of these five stages, this paper pays particular attention to the first, the selection of topic, which has often been regarded by some historians as insufficiently empirical and too personal to be recognized as a legitimate part of scholarly work. That view deserves to be challenged. History is not simply a matter of tracing and discovering sources; it is also a product of ideas. A historian who arrives without questions will not know what they are looking for, and a historian who avoids an intellectual position is not practicing neutrality but surrendering the direction of narrative to forces already in place [20]. In the context of this paper, the selection of topic is not an incidental starting point but an epistemological decision: choosing 'Aisyiyah as the subject of historiographical analysis is a conscious act of positioning within a debate about who is considered entitled to have a history. At the heuristic stage, this paper draws on primary sources including organizational documents, periodical publications of 'Aisyiyah and Muhammadiyah, history textbooks from various national curricula, and official records of historical seminars. Source criticism is applied to the authenticity and relevance of these documents in representing ‘Aisyiyah position within the broader historical narrative. Interpretation is supported by the theoretical framework outlined previously, particularly Trouillot's four moments of silencing applied concretely to each layer of the problem identified [15]. At the historiographical stage, this paper does not merely recount findings but proposes a narrative reorientation as the final product of this critical inquiry. Within a broader frame, this approach also responds to R. Moh. Ali early insistence that Indonesian historiography must think through its own methodology independently, including in matters of periodization that need not always defer to frameworks inherited from colonial or mainstream nationalist historiographical traditions[21]. It is precisely this methodological independence that becomes a prerequisite for anyone who wishes to write history from subjects that have long stood outside the boundaries of what counts as official narrative.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

From Actor to Footnote: The Absence of 'Aisyiyah in Indonesian National Historiography

Understanding ‘Aisyiyah position in Indonesian historiography requires, first and honestly, an understanding of how that historiographical tradition itself was constructed from the earliest years of independence. H.A.J. Klooster, in his comprehensive study of the development of Indonesian historical writing across the twentieth century, demonstrates that Indonesian historiography underwent a decisive paradigmatic shift: from a colonial model that positioned Indonesia as the object of European narrative, toward an Indonesia-centric model that consciously placed Indonesians as the primary actors in their own history.[2] This shift did not occur in a vacuum but within an intense political context of national identity formation, and it reached its formal articulation at the first National History Seminar in Yogyakarta in December 1957. Yet beneath the emancipatory ambition of the Indonesia-centric

paradigm lay a limitation that was not always acknowledged: it did not define with any seriousness who precisely was meant by the "Indonesians" who were to become the primary actors of history. That category in practice more often referred to political elites, military figures, and male leaders of the nationalist movement, while women, the lower classes, and religious groups not directly connected to the national political centre were consigned to the shadow zones of the narrative. R. Moh. Ali had issued an early warning about the need for methodological independence in Indonesian historiography, including in matters of periodization that should not simply inherit received frameworks.[21] That warning, however, was not adequately heard in the historiographical practice that subsequently developed, and the consequences were felt most acutely by those who had from the outset been excluded from the informal definition of who was considered entitled to possess a history.

The first National History Seminar of December 1957 in Yogyakarta was not merely an academic gathering. It was the moment at which the foundational principles of Indonesian historical writing were collectively formulated for the first time, and at which an important conceptual debate took place: whether the history being constructed for this nation should be called National History or Indonesian History. These two designations were not synonymous. The first emphasized identity construction within the frame of the state; the second pointed toward a more open geographical and cultural entity. In the end, both were accommodated in a single phrase: Indonesian National History. Yet this accommodation concealed an unresolved tension: the national narrative is by its nature a project of constructing the imagined community which, as Benedict Anderson has analysed, always operates through the simultaneous principles of inclusion and exclusion in defining who belongs to that community and who does not [22]. In the historiographical practice that emerged from the spirit of 1957, women and Islamic women's organizations entered the category of the undefined: not explicitly excluded, but never seriously included. The intellectual climate needed to fill that void had no room to develop, as the political situation moved swiftly toward the further narrowing of academic freedom. The consolidation of Soekarno's authoritarianism through Guided Democracy from 1959 onward brought with it the indoctrination of the Political Manifesto known as Manipol USDEK, which drew intellectual life and education too deeply into the jargon of revolutionary politics [23]. Muhammad Yamin's work 6000 Tahun Sang Merah Putih reflected this tendency: history deployed to legitimize political claims rather than to understand the complexity of the past honestly.[7] Amid this pressure, one phenomenon is instructive: Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah chose to draw on historical arguments about their closeness to Soekarno as a strategy of institutional survival. Soekarno's celebrated speech "Makin Lama Makin Cinta" at Muhammadiyah's fiftieth anniversary congress in 1962, and the conferral of the Muhammadiyah Star upon him in April 1965, were expressions of this strategy. Yet surviving through political proximity is not the same as building an independent tradition of historical writing. By the time the Soekarno era closed, academic production on the history of Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah remained very limited, while organizations that had earlier invested energy in writing their own internal histories held considerably stronger positions in the historiographical memory of Indonesia.

To understand ‘Aisyiyah position on this map with greater precision, a parallel trend of the same period must also be considered: the efforts of pre-independence historical actors to write down what they had experienced as history. This trend matters because it reveals that the problem of 'Aisyiyah was not simply a matter of neglect from outside but also a question of how history was being constructed from within communities with a stake in it. In this context, a rather striking irony emerges: it was actually the PKI that carried out the most systematic and institutional effort in this regard. The PKI's Historical Institute published *Pemberontakan November 1926* in 1961, while Busjarie Latif completed a manuscript on forty-five years of PKI history from 1920 to 1965 that was subsequently lost in the upheaval of 1965, and an earlier work from 1934 on Indonesian society and revolution had also circulated within the party's internal networks [24]. These works certainly had their own problems: the tension between ideological interest and historical honesty is a legitimate concern. Yet one thing that cannot be overlooked is that in some respects, the PKI's effort to contextualize the women's movement within a broader framework of struggle had already begun to surface, even if it remained within a narrow ideological frame [25]. On the other side, Muhammadiyah undertook an effort that in its character was somewhat similar: historical actors writing their own history. HM Yunus Anis, who had served as secretary of the Hoofbestuur Muhammadiyah from his early years and later became its chairman, played a significant role in driving this effort institutionally. In the early 1960s, an institution called Dokrah, an abbreviation of Dokumentasi dan Sejarah, was established by the Central Board of Muhammadiyah and produced a number of important works. Among these were dense biographical accounts of figures including KH Ahmad Dahlan, KH Faqiruddin, Siti Walidah, and KH Anis. The wealth of primary documentation that Yunus Anis possessed made these works significant, and many of the historical facts about Muhammadiyah that are known today were in all likelihood preserved through the work of this institution. Notably, Dokrah also extended its reach to local dimensions with a distinctive character, writing biographical accounts of KH Abdurrahman from Pekajangan, KH A. Dardiri from Banyumas, and even a history of Muhammadiyah in Garut, demonstrating an early awareness of the importance of locality in building a more complete organizational narrative. Yet amid all of this, the historical dimension of 'Aisyiyah remained underdeveloped, including in the biography of Siti Walidah, which logically should have served as the most natural entry point for that dimension. This is the more regrettable given that at the time many historical actors of 'Aisyiyah were still available to be interviewed. More broadly, the writing of ‘Aisyiyah history during this period appears to have been largely confined to a single channel: its own newspaper, *Suara Aisyiyah*, which in those years occasionally carried accounts of events and historical reflections, but fell far short of any systematic historical construction [26]

Across the findings presented above, a consistent pattern can be observed at work throughout this period. 'Aisyiyah was not only absent from the national historical narrative written by academic historians; it was also absent from the narratives written by historical actors themselves. Within the trend of history-writing by participants that characterized the period from 1945 to the close of the Soekarno era, 'Aisyiyah did not succeed in positioning itself as a subject with a voice. The PKI wrote its own history, with all its ideological bias. Muhammadiyah, through Dokrah, wrote its own history, with all

its limitations. Yet 'Aisyiyah, an organization whose members were genuine historical actors, did not produce an independent historical construction about itself. What remained were scattered notes across the pages of *Suara Aisyiyah* and a biography of its founder that did not sufficiently excavate the organizational dimension of the movement she had brought into being. This is what distinguishes the case of 'Aisyiyah from ordinary historiographical neglect. It was not only an object forgotten by someone else's narrative; it was also a subject that had not yet taken its own memory seriously enough. From genuine historical actor, 'Aisyiyah gradually became a footnote, and what is more troubling is that this shift occurred without meaningful resistance from within. This condition would become a critical point of departure for understanding why the structural pressures that arrived in the New Order era would find no sufficiently strong barrier to hold them back.

Domesticated and Forgotten: 'Aisyiyah under the New Order Historiographical

If historiography is part of culture, then understanding its condition during the New Order era cannot be separated from the way the New Order began its hold on power: with cultural violence. Wijaya Herlambang demonstrates that the New Order did not merely eliminate its political opponents physically but also systematically reconstructed the entire landscape of Indonesian culture through literature, film, and public narrative so that anti-communism came to feel natural, even self-evident.[27] Within a landscape already reconstructed in this way, the question of who was entitled to possess a historical narrative had been answered before the question could even be raised. One of the most effective mechanisms the New Order employed to discipline the women's movement was depoliticization operating through domestication.[28] Through institutions such as Dharma Wanita and the PKK, the state redefined Indonesian women as wives and mothers of national development, making domestic roles the only form of women's participation recognized as socially legitimate [29]. What made this mechanism so effective was not simply its structural pressure but the fact that it operated hegemonically: felt without being recognized, and in many respects even embraced, including by segments of the women's movement that ideologically should have maintained distance from the state's logic, 'Aisyiyah among them. On another front, the depoliticization of Islamic movements, itself one of the New Order's major projects, further compounded this condition by directly impacting the depoliticization of women's movements housed within Islamic organizations. As Muhammadiyah was compelled to adjust itself to the boundaries set by the state, 'Aisyiyah as its women's wing had very little room to move autonomously (B. Efendi, 2015). It is worth noting that in the same period, educational growth continued and even expanded significantly, and this is acknowledged as a genuine achievement that Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah also benefited from through the expansion of their institutional work. Yet growth in education did not automatically produce growth in historiographical consciousness. It is precisely here that the collision occurred: at the very moment of this educational expansion, the state launched its most ambitious official historiographical project. Under the editorial control of Nugroho Notosusanto, the *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia* was published in six volumes from 1975, becoming the official narrative that subsequently dominated the entire national education curriculum. This work was

a stage for the military, for the state's version of nationalism, and for the figures deemed worthy of filling the pages of national history.

Among the most effective historiographical mechanisms operating in the New Order era was the appropriation of the figure of Kartini. Before 1965, Kartini was a figure actively contested by various currents of the Indonesian women's movement. Gerwani made Kartini an icon of struggle by publishing the monthly magazine *Api Kartini* from 1959, a platform that explicitly encouraged women to organize, engage in politics, and develop collective consciousness.[31] In its pages, Gerwani declared itself the rightful heir to Kartini's legacy, not the graceful and passive Kartini but the courageous and defiant one. Pramoedya Ananta Toer in the same period published *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja*, situating Kartini as a symbol of anti-feudal and anti-imperialist resistance . The New Order closed all of these interpretive spaces. Through the destruction of Gerwani and the silencing of narratives associated with it, the New Order did not merely eliminate an organization but severed an entire lineage of meaning around what Kartini could signify for the Indonesian women's movement. What was subsequently reinforced through the curriculum and the annual Kartini Day celebrations was a Kartini already tamed: an aristocratic woman, individually educated, secular-nationalist in outlook, and essentially domestic in her aspirations. Scholarship on the biographical film *R.A. Kartini* produced in 1982 during the New Order shows how the state's representation of Kartini consistently constructed the ideal woman as obedient, non-confrontational, and confined to the role of wife and mother within the limits of her prescribed nature [32]. This is what constitutes the epistemological trap for the entirety of Indonesian women's historiography: when the state established Kartini as the singular standard for how women deserved to be remembered in history, it simultaneously defined what fell outside that standard. An organization like 'Aisyiyah, collective rather than individual, Islamic rather than secular-nationalist, movement-based rather than biographical, met none of the criteria of the New Order's Kartini template. As a consequence, in the official historiography 'Aisyiyah was not merely absent but situated outside the category considered worth remembering. The irony is that Kartini herself, in her letters, expressed genuine interest in Islam and in the struggles of Muslim women, a dimension most consistently erased from the state-produced version of her legacy [33]

While state mechanisms worked to discipline the women's movement, a paradoxical academic development was taking place in the same period: the study of Indonesian Islam was at its most productive. Clifford Geertz opened a wide door with *The Religion of Java* (1960), mapping the religious landscape of Java and attending to the modernist Islamic movement, including Muhammadiyah, as one of the formative forces in social life [34]. Geertz's work generated a chain of research that followed in subsequent decades. James L. Peacock conducted eight months of fieldwork within the Muhammadiyah community in 1970 and published *Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadijah Movement in Indonesian Islam* in 1978, an ethnographic and historical study that became one of the most influential references in the study of Indonesian Islam [35]. Peacock's work is valuable in documenting the religious vitality and social dynamics of Muhammadiyah, yet the presence of women in its narrative is barely visible. This raises a question of its own: as recounted by a Muhammadiyah figure who as a

young man had direct interaction with Peacock in the field, the researcher did in fact witness ‘Aisyiyah activities, yet that dimension found no way into his text. Mitsuo Nakamura in *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree* (1983) worked at a more micro scale, capturing the development of Muhammadiyah in Kotagede, Yogyakarta, through fieldwork conducted in 1970-1972 [36]. This is study more detailed in recording community life, and 'Aisyiyah appears in the index of his work, but as a living and socially influential dimension of Kotagede society, 'Aisyiyah appears only at the margins of the narrative. From the Indonesian research side, Alfian through his influential academic study, and MT Arifin through his more focused inquiry into the movement and its thought, also contributed important foundations to the study of Muhammadiyah, yet the construction of 'Aisyiyah in both works remained very limited.[26]

Amid this constellation of scholarship that consistently bypassed 'Aisyiyah, a partial exception began to emerge. Hyung Jun Kim, in his study of Muhammadiyah in rural Java, began to render 'Aisyiyah visible in the life he described, presenting the organizational dimension of women as part of the social dynamics of Muhammadiyah at the grassroots level [37]. This is a shift worth noting, though not sufficient to alter the general pattern. Within 'Aisyiyah and Muhammadiyah's own circles, one work deserving serious mention is Suratmin biography of Siti Walidah, *Nyai Ahmad Dahlan Pahlawan Nasional: Amal dan Perjuangannya*, published in 1977. This work stands as the only serious biography of ‘Aisyiyah founder, published nearly two decades after Siti Walidah was awarded the title of national hero in 1971. That gap in time is itself a statement about how slow the internal historiographical response had been. More troublingly, nearly fifty years after the publication of Suratmin work, no comparable work has been produced by the organization. The historiographical works that followed, such as those by Ro'fah [38] and Siti Syamsiyatun [39] , are individual contributions in academic contexts, not collective organizational projects. This is a serious void within a movement whose members are, paradoxically, educated women who should be most capable of filling it.

From the totality of findings in this sub-section, one conclusion is difficult to avoid: the New Order did not merely continue the historiographical problem that had existed since 1957; it completed it. That completion operated from two directions simultaneously. From outside, the state built its hegemony over historical narrative through the *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia*, depoliticized the women's movement through state *Ibuisme*, and tamed Kartini into a singular template that excluded every form of women's presence grounded in Islam, collectivity, and political consciousness. From within, the neutralization experienced by 'Aisyiyah left the organization without sufficient space or energy to mount a meaningful historiographical response. While foreign scholars competed to document Indonesian Islam and produced influential works, 'Aisyiyah was barely present in the constructions they built, and the organization itself managed to produce only one biography of its founder nearly two decades after the conferral of the national hero title. What distinguishes this condition from mere negligence is that it is structural and layered: each preceding layer of the problem was never resolved but only buried beneath a new one. When the New Order era finally collapsed in 1998 and opened space for a revival of Indonesian women's historiography, 'Aisyiyah entered that momentum without an adequate historical

construction to its name, arriving late, and carrying a legacy of absence that had been accumulating for far too long.

The Limits of Revival: 'Aisyiyah and the Unfinished Business of Post-Reformasi Historiography

The collapse of the New Order in 1998 reopened the relationship between historical knowledge and political authority. Experiences previously subordinated to official narratives entered public discussion through testimony, cultural production, research, and renewed demands for recognition. Yet this opening did not produce an equal recovery of every marginalized past [40] . The opportunity to speak was not the same as the capacity to establish a durable historical narrative. Post-Reformasi historiography developed through competing efforts to recover, interpret, and circulate the past, making political openness a condition of historical renewal rather than a guarantee of its realization: the late 1980s through the mid-1990s, when social pressure against the regime was intensifying and history was slowly recovering its function as a tool of expression. The growing criticism of the New Order among intellectuals and students did not speak only to present social and political conditions; it also began reaching back to the past as a source of legitimacy for questioning and resistance. Indonesian Islamic intellectualism at that time was at one of its peaks: scholars educated at Western universities were beginning to exert significant social and intellectual influence. Ahmad Syafii Maarif, with his background in historical studies, and Nurcholish Madjid both consistently drew on historical arguments in their critical discourse, making history not merely a record of the past but a foundation for a more honest rereading of Indonesian Islam [41]. It was within this atmosphere of slow but perceptible movement that a small but noteworthy event took place: in June 1994 in Yogyakarta, a National Seminar on Muhammadiyah History was held and attended by a number of senior historians. The seminar was not a major event and its influence was not widely felt, but it was a sign that within Muhammadiyah there was a consciousness beginning to stir about the need to formulate its history more seriously. Unfortunately that agenda was short lived. The social and political situation had not yet fully opened, and the absence of adequate institutional follow-through meant the seminar remained more a passing moment than the starting point of something sustained. The door was almost open, but not yet.

When the New Order finally collapsed in 1998, what had long been held back seemed to break open all at once. History became a crowded and energetic terrain: issues suppressed for three decades suddenly found space to be spoken. The cases of the Jugun Ianfu, the destruction of Gerwani, and various human rights violations involving women surfaced into public discourse and became part of a broader conversation[42]. The women's movement responded to this momentum by establishing new institutions focused on gender issues, and within the historiographical context, new publication spaces began giving room to voices that had never previously had a platform[43]. At the academic level, an impulse to rethink how Indonesia understood its own history produced reflective collective works that critically examined long-accepted methodologies and offered more open perspectives toward previously marginalised subjects. Alongside this, a discourse about the need to correct the distortions of Indonesian history also grew stronger, though this discourse was not without critics who regarded it

as more emotional than methodological [44]. This broad current of deconstruction was the most productive that Indonesian post-independence historiography had ever seen. Yet it had its limits. For Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah, the same period was one in which organisational energy was drawn intensely into political activism. The space that had opened to formulate the organisation's history was not used in a commensurate way, not because there was no one capable of doing so, but because other agendas were judged more pressing. While Indonesian women's historiography was moving in bolder and more diverse directions, 'Aisyiyah entered the first decades of the twenty-first century with a historiographical inheritance that remained unconsolidated.

Institutional responsibility cannot be assessed solely through the presence or absence of a centrally commissioned historical project. Records and memories may survive through informal practices, personal collections, voluntary documentation, and forms of labor that remain largely invisible in official accounts. Such work must be identified before its institutional limitations can be judged [45] . The critical question is whether these efforts receive recognition, support, and continuity, and whether their outcomes are connected to research, education, and organizational reflection. The distinction is not between individual work that matters and collective work that does not yet exist, but between dispersed achievements and the arrangements needed to sustain and develop them.

The unfinished business of the post-Reformasi period therefore lies in the relationship between historical production and collective responsibility. The existence of scholarship does not settle that responsibility; it makes the question of continuity more pressing. Individual achievement should not become an alibi for institutional complacency. Ahistoricism, as used here, names not an absence of historical awareness among members, but the distance between possessing historical knowledge and organizing the conditions for its continued development. The task is not to begin as though nothing has been written. It is to prevent what has already been achieved from remaining disconnected, dependent on individual endurance, and vulnerable to interruption.

DISCUSSION

The Architecture of Silence: Power, Structure, and the Making of ‘Aisyiyah Historiographical Absence

The findings presented in the preceding section point toward one analytical conclusion that deserves careful formulation: the historiographical problem of 'Aisyiyah is not primarily about the absence of its name in historical texts. That way of seeing, which reduces the historiographical problem to a matter of representation and inclusion, is itself part of the problem [46]. What is truly absent is not a name but a historical construction, a framework that would enable 'Aisyiyah to understand itself historically, to position itself within a broader current of history, and to speak from the position of a sovereign subject rather than an object demanding recognition. Within Trouillot's analytical framework on the mechanisms of historical silencing, the case of 'Aisyiyah presents a specificity worth noting [15].

The first two moments he identifies, the making of sources and the making of archives, do not apply straightforwardly here, since academic historians from various backgrounds have in fact acknowledged the richness and credibility of Muhammadiyah and ‘Aisyiyah archives as a modern organization that has continuously documented itself. The problem is not the absence of sources. What operates more decisively in this case are Trouillot's third and fourth moments: how narratives are produced from selections among available sources, and how historical retrospection reproduces those selections across generations. This mechanism does not operate in isolation but functions within a broader framework in which historical silencing always carries a gendered dimension inseparable from the power structures that underlie it [47]. The state's archival paradigm was built from the outset around an orientation toward governmental and power archives rather than movement archives, so the richness of 'Aisyiyah sources never truly entered the mainstream of national narrative production, not because they did not exist, but because no framework existed to render them relevant [48]. This is the true architecture of silencing: not active erasure but structural neglect operating through choices about what is considered worthy of becoming history.

The structural amnesia identified above does not operate in a vacuum. It is rooted in something deeper than state policy or historians' negligence: an epistemological system that has historically constructed women as a secondary category in the production of historical knowledge. Feminist historiographical scholarship has demonstrated that gender is not a variable added to pre-existing narratives but a category that actively shapes how historical knowledge is produced from its very foundations[49]. In the Indonesian context, this condition has been formulated precisely by the tradition of local critical historiography: that Indonesian historical writing has been too dominated by themes of politics and military affairs that are at their core a history of male power, and women within that tradition have always been placed at the margins, never at the centre. This is not a matter of individual bias among historians but of how the paradigm governing what is considered worthy of becoming history was formed and transmitted across generations without ever being seriously questioned. What further complicates the matter is that 'Aisyiyah did not experience active erasure as some other women's movements did; it was affected by an accumulation of neglect that persisted over time, and precisely because no single hand of power explicitly removed it, there was no single point of resistance around which a response could be organized. It is here that the deepest paradox in this case is felt most acutely. The organization does not lack intellectuals capable of reading and responding to this condition: the academic works produced by its figures in the last two decades demonstrate a high level of historical consciousness and analytical capability that requires no qualification. Yet as scholarship on collective memory and social movements has shown, individual consciousness however sharp does not automatically convert into a collective project; it requires institutional mechanisms that actively organize, sustain, and develop that consciousness as a shared agenda [50]. That mechanism has not yet taken shape. What is absent is not capability but the institutional architecture that converts individual intellectual capacity into a historical construction recognized as a collective organizational responsibility. It is this disparity between the capacity possessed and the agenda pursued that makes the case of 'Aisyiyah not merely a historiographical problem but a more fundamental institutional one.

The two layers of the problem analysed in this sub-section, the structural amnesia operating through a historiographical paradigm that never provided a category for 'Aisyiyah as a sovereign subject, and the absence of an institutional mechanism converting intellectual capacity into collective historical construction, are not two problems standing independently of each other. They mutually produce one another: the amnesia from outside provides implicit justification for the inertia from within, while the inertia from within allows the amnesia from outside to continue accumulating without meaningful resistance. As long as this cycle is not broken from at least one of its sides, a condition that has persisted for more than a century will not change simply because time moves forward. What must be affirmed here is that this condition is not inevitable. It is the product of historical choices formed within particular contexts, which means it can also be changed through new choices that are conscious and organized. The resources for that change already exist: an extensive intellectual network, a rich tradition of documentation, a newspaper of nearly a century's standing, and a new generation of history practitioners growing in seriousness that does not always receive commensurate recognition. What does not yet exist is the institutional framework that puts all of these resources to work together as a coherent historical project. The following section of this discussion will identify the directions of reorientation that would allow those resources to be organized into a sovereign historical construction.

From Footnote to Foundation: A Path Toward ‘Aisyiyah Historiographical Reorientation

The historiographical reorientation that 'Aisyiyah needs does not have to start from nothing, because the resources for it already exist. One of the most tangible yet least acknowledged is the growth of a public history ecosystem among Indonesia's younger generation over the last two decades[51]. This generation is not merely consuming history passively but producing it actively through various channels: writing, local heritage tours, exhibitions, digital media, and public platforms that reach audiences far broader than conventional academic publications have ever been able to reach. Notably, this tendency has also been growing within Muhammadiyah's own circles, where interest in the organization's history has strengthened among younger people in ways that are more creative and more methodologically open[52]. Yet a recurring problem deserves honest critique: this younger generation is too often dismissed by its predecessors as not serious, as treating history merely as entertainment or visual consumption. This view is not only unfair; it is counterproductive. Seriousness in historical study does not always present itself in the form of a thick academic monograph; it can present itself as patient fieldwork, oral traditions that are carefully maintained, or public narratives delivered with methodological honesty no less rigorous than academic standards. In this context, the establishment of the Muhammadiyah Museum, initiated in 2017 and inaugurated in November 2022, is an achievement worth noting as evidence that institutional investment in history is both possible and within the organization's capacity. The question then is no longer about capability but about direction: why has the same capacity and seriousness not yet been organized to build a historical construction of 'Aisyiyah commensurate with its position and contribution in the history of Indonesian women.

The historiographical reorientation proposed above cannot proceed without one prerequisite that is often overlooked in discussions of organizational historiography: the active and purposeful management of historical sources, not merely their passive preservation. In this regard, 'Aisyiyah is actually in a better position than is often assumed [53]. Its archives are reasonably well maintained, and a long-standing document acquisition collaboration with government institutions has provided significant assistance in sustaining the completeness of the collection. Yet there is a problem deeper than the physical condition of the archives: these documents are stored but have not yet become part of how the organization formulates policy and understands itself. They are preserved but not infrequently forgotten when needed. Scholarship on the archives of feminist organizations has shown that the difference between an archive that is preserved and one that is integrated into organizational life is the difference between living memory and dead memory[54]. Beyond written archives, oral history holds potential that has not yet been fully recognized. The intellectualism of 'Aisyiyah as a modernist movement gives the oral tradition within this organization a quality that distinguishes it from mere personal recollection: its figures do not simply narrate, they analyze, reflect, and situate experience within broader frameworks. Several oral documentation efforts have been undertaken within Muhammadiyah circles in recent years, and this is a resource that needs to be developed more systematically. Meanwhile, *Suara Aisyiyah*, a newspaper whose age nearly rivals that of the organization itself, holds a record that documents not only ‘Aisyiyah own journey as an organization but also the movement of Indonesian women's history across nearly a century. Its reasonably good physical condition is welcome news, but a well-preserved physical state does not automatically ensure that its historical content is managed in a substantive way. A newspaper of nearly a century's standing requires a particular curatorial approach, not only to preserve its paper but to make its content and trajectory a living source for the historical construction being built.

The historiographical reorientation proposed in this paper does not need to begin from outside. Its materials already exist within 'Aisyiyah itself, they have simply never been treated as the foundation of a serious historical construction. For more than a century, 'Aisyiyah has worked from the grassroots at thousands of points across Indonesia, and that locality-based way of working holds a richness of narrative that no other women's organization in this country possesses. The history of 'Aisyiyah is not only the history of one national organization; it is the history of how Muslim women in Yogyakarta, Garut, Pekajangan, Banyumas, and hundreds of other places built their shared lives, educated their children, cared for the sick, and sustained their convictions amid pressures that shifted from one era to the next. No national women's history template can encompass all of that, and it is precisely there that the narrative strength lies, still unworked. The Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan, formulated by 'Aisyiyah in 2022, states plainly that the organization's more than a century of dynamics represents a women's movement that is forward-thinking and actively engaged, a movement of dakwah, of social practice, and of participation in national and universal human life.[53] What is significant for this paper is not merely what the document states but the way it frames history without recognizing that it is performing historical framing. The formulation that a progressive woman is a woman of knowledge grounded in faith is not only a statement about the future; it is a historiographical principle if operationalized: a way of reading

Islamic women's history that does not separate advancement from faith, that does not submit to the secular template that has long dominated the national women's narrative, and that begins from the concrete experience of millions of women at the grassroots rather than from elite biography. This is a distinctiveness that no other women's movement in Indonesia possesses, and it already exists within ‘Aisyiyah own formulations. What has not yet been done is to reverse the direction of its gaze: not only to formulate a vision forward but to build a narrative backward, making more than a century of that journey into history that is constructed, maintained, and claimed as its own. Historical amnesia will not be resolved by time. It can only be ended by the conscious decision to begin building.

CONCLUSION

The analytical journey undertaken here began from a simple but serious anomaly: a women's movement whose age predates the most iconic milestones in the history of Indonesian nationalism, yet one that never secured a commensurate place in the historical narrative built from those very events. This condition is not a historiographical accident but the product of an accumulated neglect operating in layers, from the way the paradigm of national history writing was formed, to the successive pressures placed on women's and Islamic movements, to the internal failure to convert an abundance of sources and intellectual capacity into a sovereign historical construction. What distinguishes this argument from a mere critique of representation is its insistence on the distinction between asking to be recognized and building one's own narrative. These two orientations are not simply different strategies; they are epistemologically different. As long as the first is chosen, the problem will not be resolved no matter how many names are eventually added to textbooks. The reorientation offered here is not one from outside but from within, from a distinctiveness already possessed but never treated as foundation: a locality-based way of working that is rich in narrative, a moral framework for Islamic women's movement that does not separate progress from faith, and historical sources already preserved but waiting to be shaped into something more than an archive. In the end, this is not an argument about an organization demanding its place in someone else's history. It is about a movement old enough and rich enough to write its own.

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